

## LIVE TALES OF THE DIAMOND

By ZANE GREY

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"FELLOWS, it's this way. You've got to win today's game. It's the last of the season and means the Pennant for Worcester. One more hard scrap and we're done! Of all the up-hill fights any bunch ever made to land the flag, ours has been the best. You're the best team I ever managed, the gamest gang of ball players that ever stepped in spikes. We've played in the hardest kind of luck all season, except that short trip we called the Rube's Honeymoon. We got a bad start, and sore arms and busted fingers, all kinds of injuries, every accident calculated to hurt a team's chances, came our way. But in spite of it all we got the lead and we've held it, and today we're still a few points ahead of Buffalo."

I paused to catch my breath, and looked round on the grim, tired faces of my players. They made a stern group. The close of the season found them almost played out. What a hard chance it was, after their extraordinary efforts, to bring the issue of the Pennant down to this last game!

"If we lose today, Buffalo, with three games more to play at home, will pull the bunting," I went on. "But they're not going to win! I'm putting it up to you that way. I know Spears is all in; Raddy's arm is gone; Ash is playing on one leg; you're all crippled. But you've got one more game in you, I know. These last few weeks the Rube has been pitching out of turn and he's about all in, too. He's kept us in the lead. If he wins today it'll be the Rube's Pennant. But that might apply to all of you. Now, shall we talk over the play today? Any tricks to pull off? Any inside work?"

"Con, you're pretty much upset and nervous," replied Spears, soberly. "It ain't no wonder. This has been one corker of a season. I want to suggest that you let me run the team today. I've talked over the play with the fellows. We ain't goin' to lose this game. Con, Buffalo has been comin' with a rush lately, an' they're confident. But we've been holdin' in, restin' up as much as we dared an' still keep our lead. Maybe it'll surprise you to know we've bet every dollar we could get hold of on this game. Why, Buffalo money is everywhere."

"All right, Spears, I'll turn the team over to you. We've got the banner crowd of the year out there right now, a great crowd to play before. I'm more fussed up over this game than any I remember. But I have a sort of blind faith in my team. \* \* \* I guess that's all I want to say."

Spears led the silent players out of the dressing room and I followed; and while they began to toss balls to and fro, to limber up cold dead arms, I sat on the bench.

The Bisons were prancing about the diamond, and their swaggering assurance was not conducive to hope for the Worcesters. I wondered how many of that vast, noisy audience, intent on the day's sport, even had a thought of what pain and toil it meant to my players. The Buffalo men were in good shape; they had been lucky; they were at the top of their stride, and that made all the difference.

At any rate, there were a few faithful little women in the grandstand—Milly and Nan and Rose Stringer and Kate Bogart—who sat with compressed lips and hoped and prayed for that game to begin and end.

The gong called off the practice, and Spears, taking the field, yelled gruff encouragement to his men. Umpire Carter brushed off the plate and tossed a white ball to the Rube and called: "Play!" The bleachers set up an exultant, satisfied shout and sat down to wait.

Schultz toed the plate and watched the Rube pitch a couple. There seemed to be no diminution of the great pitcher's speed and both balls cut the plate. Schultz clipped the next one down the third-base line. Bogart trapped it close to the bag, and got it away underhand beating the speedy runner by a nose. It was a pretty play to start with, and the spectators were not close-mouthed in appreciation. The short, stocky Carl ambled up to bat, and I heard him call the Rube something. It was not a friendly contest, this deciding game between Buffalo and Worcester.

"Bring one close to his swelled nut!" growled Spears to the Rube.

Carl chopped a bouncing grounder through short and Ash was after it like a tiger, but it was a hit. The Buffalo contingent opened up. Then Manning faced the Rube, and he, too, vented sarcasm. It might not have been heard by the slow, imperturbable pitcher for all the notice he took. Carl edged off first, slid back twice, got a third start, and on the Rube's pitch was off for second base with the lead that always made him dangerous. Manning swung vainly, and Gregg snapped a throw to Mullaney. Ball and runner got to the bag apparently simultaneously; the umpire called

Carl out, and the crowd uttered a quick roar of delight.

The next pitch to Manning was a strike. Rube was not wasting any balls, a point I noted with mingled fear and satisfaction. For he might have felt that he had no strength to spare that day and so could not try to work the batters. Again he swung, and Manning rapped a long line fly over McCall. As the little left fielder turned at the sound of the hit and sprinted out, his lameness was certainly not in evidence. He was the swiftest runner in the league and always when he got going the crowd rose in wild clamor to watch him. Mac took that fly right off the foul flag in deep left, and the bleachers dimmed their pleasure.

The teams changed positions. "Fellers," said Spears, savagely, "we may be a bunged-up lot of stiff, but say! We can hit! If you love your old captain—sting the ball!"

Vane, the Bison pitcher, surely had his work cut out for him. For one sympathetic moment I saw his part through his eyes. My Worcester veterans, long used to being under fire, were relentlessly bent on taking that game. It showed in many ways, particularly in their silence, because they were seldom a silent team. McCall hesitated a moment over his bats. Then, as he picked up the lightest one, I saw his jaw set, and I knew he intended to bunt. He was lame, yet he meant to beat out an infield hit. He went up scowling.

Vane had an old head, and he had a varied assortment of balls. For Mac he used an underhand curve, rising at the plate and curving in to the left-hander. Mac stepped back and let it go. "That's the place, Bo," cried the Buffalo infielders. "Keep 'em close on the Crab." Eager and fierce as McCall was, he let pitch after pitch go by till he had three balls and two strikes. Still the heady Vane sent up another pitch similar to the others. Mac stepped forward in the box, dropped his bat on the ball, and leaped down the line toward first base. Vane came rushing in for the bunt, got it and threw. But as the speeding ball neared the baseman, Mac stretched out into the air and shot for the bag. By a fraction of a second he beat the ball. It was one of his demon slivers. He knew that the chances favored his being crippled; we all knew that some day Mac would slide recklessly once too often. But that, too, is all in the game and in the spirit of a great player.

"We're on," said Spears; "now keep with him."

By that the captain meant that Mac would go down, and Ashwell would hit with the run.

When Vane pitched, little McCall was flitting toward second. The Bison shortstop started for the bag, and Ash hit square through his tracks. A rolling cheer burst from the bleachers, and swelled till McCall overran third base and was thrown back by the coacher. Stringer hurried forward with his big bat.

"Oh! My!" yelled a fan, and he voiced my sentiments exactly. Here we would score, and be one run closer to that dearly bought pennant.

How well my men worked together! As the pitcher let the ball go, Ash was digging for second and Mac was shooting plateward. They played on the chance of Stringer's hitting. Stringer swung, the bat cracked, and he heard a thud somewhere, and then Manning, half knocked over, was fumbling for the ball. He had knocked down a terrific drive with his mitt, and he got the ball in time to put Stringer out. But Mac scored and Ash drew a throw to third base and beat it. He had a bad ankle, but no one noticed it in that daring run.

"Watch me paste one!" said Captain Spears, as he spat several yards. He batted out a fly so long and high and far that, slow as he was, he had nearly run to second base when Carl made the catch. Ash easily scored on the throw-in. Then Bogart sent one skipping over second, and Treadwell, scooping it on the run, completed a play that showed why he was considered the star of the Bison infield.

"Two runs, fellers!" said Spears. "That's some! Push 'em over, Rube." The second inning somewhat quickened the pace. Even the Rube worked a little faster. Ellis lined to Cairns in right; Treadwell fouled two balls and had a called strike, and was out; McKnight hit a low fly over short, then Bud Wiler sent one between Spears and Mullaney. Spears went for it while the Rube with giant strides ran to cover first base. Between them they got Bud, but it was only because he was heavy and slow on his feet.

In our half of that inning Mullaney, Gregg and Cairns went out in one, two, three order.

With Pannell up, I saw that the Rube held in on his speed, or else he was tiring. Pannell hit the second slow ball for two bases. Vane sacrificed, and then the redoubtable Schultz

## IX.--The Rube's Pennant

came up. He appeared to be in no hurry to bat. Then I saw that the foxy Buffalo players were working to tire the Rube. They had the situation figured. But they were no wiser than old Spears.

"Make 'em hit, Rube. Push 'em straight over. Never mind the corners. We don't care for a few runs. We'll hit this game out."

Shultz fled to Mac, who made a beautiful throw to the plate too late

to catch Pannell. Carl deliberately bunted to the right of the Rube and it cost the big pitcher strenuous effort to catch his man.

"We got the Rube waggin'!" yelled a Buffalo player.

Manning tripled down the left foul line—a hit the bleachers called a screamer. When Ellis came up, it looked like a tie score, and when the Rube pitched it was plain that he was tired. The Bisons yelled their assurance of this and the audience settled into quiet. Ellis batted a scorcher that looked good for a hit. But the fast Ashwell was moving with the ball, and he plunged lengthwise to get it square in his glove. The hit had been so sharp that he had time to get up and make the throw to beat the runner. The bleachers thundered at the play.

"You're up, Rube," called Spears. "Lam one out of the lot!"

The Rube was an uncertain batter. There was never any telling what he might do, for he had spells of good and bad hitting. But when he did get his bat on the ball it meant a chase for some fielder. He went up swinging his huge club, and he hit a fly that would have been an easy home run for a fast man. But the best Rube could do was to reach third base. This was certainly good enough, as the bleachers loudly proclaimed, and another tally for us seemed sure.

McCall bunted toward third, another of his teasers. The Rube would surely have scored had he started with the ball, but he did not try and missed a chance. Wiler, of course, held the ball, and Mac got to first without especial effort. He went down on the first pitch. Then Ash lined to Carl. The Rube waited till the ball was caught and started for home. The crowd screamed, the Rube ran for all he was worth and Carl's throw to the plate shot in low and true. Ellis blocked the Rube and tagged him out.

It looked to the bleachers as if El-

lis had been unnecessarily rough, and they hissed and stormed disapproval. As for me, I knew the Bisons were losing no chance to wear out my pitcher. Stringer fouled out with Mac on third, and it made him so angry that he threw his bat toward the bench, making some of the boys skip lively.

The next three innings, as far as scoring was concerned, were all for Buffalo. But the Worcester infield

nin' played dirty with me—gave me the hip."

"I called you out."

"Shut up now! Get off the diamond!" ordered Carter, peremptorily.

"What? Me? Say, I'm captain of this team. Can't I question a decision?"

"Not mine. Spears, you're delaying the game."

"I tell you it was a rotten decision," yelled Spears. The bleachers agreed with him.

Carter grew red in the face. He



The Rube took his weary swing.

played magnificent ball, holding their opponents to one run each inning.

That made the score 4 to 2 in favor of Buffalo.

In the last half of the sixth, with Ash on first base and two men out, old Spears hit another of his lofty flies, and this one went over the fence and tied the score. How the bleachers roared! It was full two minutes before they quieted down. To make it all the more exciting, Bogart hit safely, ran like a deer to third on Mullaney's grounder, which Wiler knocked down, and scored on a passed ball. Gregg ended the inning by striking out.

"Get at the Rube!" boomed Ellis, the Bison captain. "We'll have him up in the air soon. Get in the game now, you sticklers!"

Before I knew what had happened, the Bisons had again tied the score. They were indomitable. They grew stronger all the time. A stroke of good luck now would clinch the game for them. The Rube was beginning to labor in the box; Ashwell was limping; Spears looked as if he would drop any moment; McCall could scarcely walk. But if the ball came his way he could still run. Nevertheless, I never saw any finer fielding than these crippled players executed that inning.

"Ash—Mac—can you hold out?" I asked, when they limped in. I received glances of scorn for my question. Spears, however, was not sanguine.

"I'll stick pretty much if somethin' doesn't happen," he said, "but I'm all in. I'll need a runner if I get to first this time."

Spears lumbered down to first base on an infield hit and the heavy Manning gave him the hip. Old Spears went down in more ways than that signified by Carter's sharp: "Out!"

The old war-horse gathered himself up slowly and painfully, and with his arms folded and his jaw protruding, he limped toward the umpire.

"Did you call me out?" he asked, in a voice plainly audible to any one on the field.

"Yes," snapped Carter.

"What for? I beat the ball, an' Man-

closed in for a bunt, but the Rube had no orders for that style of play. Spears had said nothing to him. Vane lost his nonchalance and settled down. He cut loose with all his speed. Rube stepped out, suddenly whirled, then tried to dodge, but the ball hit him fair in the back. Rube sagged in his tracks, then straightened up, and walked slowly to first base.

Score 5 to 5, bases full, no outs, McCall at bat. I sat dumb on the bench, thrilling and shivering. McCall Ashwell Stringer to bat!

"Play it safe! Hold the bags!" yelled the coacher.

McCall fairly spouted defiance as he faced Vane.

"Pitch! It's all off! An' you know it!"

If Vane knew that, he showed no evidence of it. His face was cold, unsmiling, rigid. He had to pitch to McCall, the fastest man in the league; to Ashwell, the best bunter; to Stringer, the champion batter. It was a supreme test for a great pitcher. There was only one kind of a ball that McCall was not sure to hit, and that was a high curve, in close Vane threw it with all his power. Carter called it a strike. Again Vane swung and his arm fairly cracked. Mac fouled the ball. The third was wide. Slowly, with lifting breast, Vane got ready, whirled savagely and shot up the ball. McCall struck out.

As the Buffalo players crowded and the audience groaned, it was worthy of note that little McCall showed no temper. Yet he had failed to grasp a great opportunity.

"Ash, I couldn't see 'em," he said, as he passed to the bench. "Speed, whew! look out for it. He's been savin' up. Hit quick, an' you'll get 'em."

Ashwell bent over the plate and glowered at Vane.

"Pitch! It's all off, an' you know it!" he hissed, using Mac's words.

Ashwell, too, was left-handed; he, too, was extremely hard to pitch to; and if he had a weakness that any of us ever discovered, it was a slow curve and change of pace. But I doubted if Vane would dare to use slow balls to Ash at that critical moment. I had yet to learn something of Vane. He gave Ash a slow, wide-sweeping sidewheeler, that curved round over the plate. Ash always took a strike, so this did not matter. Then Vane used his deceptive change of pace, sending up a curve, but just missed Ash's bat as he swung.

"Oh! A-sh-h! hit!" wailed the bleachers.

Vane doubled up like a contortionist and shot up a lightning-swift drop that fooled Ash completely. Again the crowd groaned. Score tied, bases full, two out, Stringer at bat!

"It's up to you, String," called Ash, stepping aside.

Stringer did not call out to Vane. That was not his way. He stood tense and alert, bat on his shoulder, his powerful form braced and he waited. The outfielders trotted over toward right field, and the infielders played deep, calling out warnings and encouragement to the pitcher. Stringer had no weakness, and Vane knew this. Nevertheless he did not manifest any uneasiness, and pitched the first ball without any extra motion. Carter called it a strike. I saw Stringer sink down slightly and grow tenser all over. I believe that moment was longer for me than for either the pitcher or the batter. Vane took his time, watched the base runners, feigned to throw to catch them, and then delivered the ball toward the plate with the limit of his power.

Stringer hit the ball. As long as I live, I will see that glancing low liner. Shultz, by a wonderful play in deep center, blocked the ball and thereby saved it from being a home run. But when Stringer stopped on second base all the runners had scored.

A shrill, shrieking, high-pitched yell! The bleachers threatened to destroy the stands and also their throats in one long revel of baseball madness.

Jones, batting in place of Spears, had gone up and fouled out before the uproar had subsided.

"Fellers, I reckon I feel easier," said the Rube, "as the only time I had ever heard him speak to the players at such a stage."

"Only six batters, Rube," called out Spears. "Boys, it's a grand game, an' it's our'n!"

The Rube had enough that inning to dispose of the lower end of the Buffalo list. And in our half, Bogart and Mullaney hit vicious ground balls that gave Treadwell and Wiler opportunities for superb plays. Carl, likewise, made a beautiful running catch of Gregg's line fly. The Bisons were still in the game, still capable of pulling it out at the last moment.

When Shultz stalked up to the plate I shut my eyes a moment, and so still was that the field and stands might have been empty. Yet, though I tried, I could not keep my eyes closed. I opened them to watch the Rube. I knew Spears felt the same as I, for he was blowing like a porpoise and muttering to himself: "Maybe the Rube won't last an' I've no one to put in."

The Rube pitched with heavy, violent effort. He had still enough speed to be dangerous. But after the manner of ball players Shultz and the coachers mocked him.

"Take all you can," called Ellis to Shultz.

Every pitch lessened the Rube's strength—and these wise opponents knew it. Likewise the Rube himself knew, and never had he shown better head work than in this inning. If he were to win, he must be quick. So he wasted not a ball. The first pitch and the second, delivered breast high and fairly over the plate, beautiful balls to hit. Shultz watched speed by.

He swung hard on the third and the crippled Ashwell dove for it in a cloud of dust, got a hand in front of it, but uselessly, for the hit was safe. The crowd cheered that splendid effort.

Carl marched to bat, and he swung his club over the plate as if he knew what to expect. "Come on, Rube!" he

shouted. Wearily, doggedly, the Rube whirled, and whipped his arm. The ball had all his old glancing speed making a tremendous effort. Again he got his body in convulsive motion—two strikes! Shultz had made any move to run, nor had Carl made any move to hit. These veterans were waiting. The Rube had pitched five strikes—could he last?

"Now, Carl!" yelled Ellis, with startling suddenness, as the Rube pitched again.

Crack! Carl placed that hit as safely through short as if he had thrown it. McCall's little legs twinkled as he dashed over the grass. He had to head off that hit and he ran like a streak. Down and forward he pitched, as if in one of his fierce slides, and he got his body in front of the ball, blocking it, and then he rolled over and over. But he jumped up and lined the ball to Bogart, almost catching Shultz at third-base. Then, as Mac tried to walk, his lame leg buckled under him, and down he went, and out.

"Call time," I called to Carter. "McCall is done. \* \* \* Myers, you go to left an' for Lord's sake play ball!"

Stringer and Bogart hurried to Mac and, lifting him up, supported him between their shoulders, they led him off amid cheers from the stands. Mac was white with pain.

"Naw, I won't go off the field. Leave me on the bench," he said. "Fight 'em now. It's our game. Never mind a couple of runs."

The boys ran back to their positions and Carter called play. Perhaps a little delay had been helpful to the Rube. Slowly he stepped into the box and watched Shultz at third and Carl at second. There was not much probability of his throwing to catch them off the base, but enough of a possibility to make them careful, so he held them close.

The Rube pitched a strike to Manning, then another. That made eight strikes square over the plate that inning. What magnificent control! It was equaled by the implacable patience of those veteran Bisons. Manning hit the next ball as hard as Carl had hit his. But Mullaney plunged down, came up with the ball, feinted to fool Carl, then let drive to Gregg to catch the fleeing Shultz. The throw went wide, but Gregg got it, and, leaping lengthwise, tagged Shultz out a yard from the plate.

One out. Two runners on bases. The bleachers rose and split their throats. Would the inning never end? Spears kept telling himself: "They'll score, but we'll win. It's our game!"

I had a sickening fear that the strange confidence that obsessed the Worcester players had been blind, unreasoning vanity.

"Carl will steal," muttered Spears. "He can't be stopped."

Spears had called the play. The Rube tried to hold the little base-stealer close to second, but after one attempt, wisely turned to his hard task of making the Bisons hit and hit quickly. Ellis let the ball pass. Gregg made a perfect throw to third; Bogart caught the ball and moved like a flash, but Carl slid under his hands to the bag. Manning ran down to second. The Rube pitched again, and this was his tenth ball over the plate. Even the Buffalo players evinced eloquent appreciation of the Rube's defense at this last stand.

Then Ellis sent a clean hit to right, scoring both Carl and Manning. I breathed easier, for it seemed with those two runners in, the Rube had a better chance. Treadwell also took those two runners in the Rube had a way those Bisons waited. They had their reward, for the Rube's speed left him. When he pitched again the ball had control, but no shoot. Treadwell hit it well but he didn't hit a huge act Ashwell pounced upon it, ran over second base, forcing Ellis, and his speedy snap to first almost caught Treadwell.

Score 8 to 7. Two out. Runner on first. One run to tie.

In my hazy, dimmed vision I saw the Rube's pennant waving from the flag-pole.

"It's our game!" howled Spears in my ear, for the noise from the stands was deafening. "It's our pennant!"

The formidable batting strength of the Bisons had been met, not without disaster, but without defeat. McKnight came up for Buffalo and the Rube took his weary swing. The batter made a terrific lunge and hit the ball with a solid crack. It lined for center.

Suddenly electrified into action, I leaped up. That hit! It froze me with horror. It was a home-run. I saw Stringer fly toward left center. He ran like something wild. I saw the heavy Treadwell lumbering round the bases. I saw Ashwell run out into center field.

"Ahh!" The whole audience relieved its terror in that expulsion of suspended breath. Stringer had leaped high to knock down the ball, saving a sure home-run and the game. He recovered himself, dashed back for the ball and shot it to Ash.

When Ash turned toward the plate, Treadwell was rounding third base. A tie score appeared inevitable. I saw Ash's arm whip and the ball shoot forward, leveled, glancing, beautiful in its flight. The crowd saw it, and the silence broke to a yell that rose and rose as the ball sped in. That yell swelled to a splitting shriek, and Treadwell slid in the dust, and the ball shot into Gregg's hands all at the same instant.

Carter waved both arms upwards. It was the umpire's action when his decision went against the base-runner. The audience rolled up one great stentorian cry.

"Out!"

I collapsed and sank back upon the bench. My confused senses received a dull roar of pounding feet and dimming voices as the herald of victory. I felt myself thinking how pleased Milly would be. I had a distinct picture in my mind of a white cottage on a hill, no longer a dream, but a reality, made possible for me by the Rube's winning of the pennant.